

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BANGKOK 007014

SIPDIS

FOR R, P AND EAP/MLS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2015

TAGS: [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATTING EXTREMISM

REF: STATE 159129

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH L. BOYCE: REASON: 1.4 (D)

1. (C) Summary: The ongoing insurgency in the southern three provinces is the most significant manifestation of extremism in Thailand. The problem is primarily ethnic and to some extent separatist in its origin, rather than sectarian, although international, radical Islam is having an effect, building its influence through internet, media, and education. Violence and extremist rhetoric in the south is not directed, for the most part, at the US. Over the past year, some of the violence has been directed at religious symbols or individuals. The USG has a wide range of programs to build tolerance and counter extremism and violence. These programs are making a modest contribution, but the problem will certainly be long-term and cannot be solved without a more coherent and effective approach by the Thai government. Although the Thai government has supported efforts, such as the National Reconciliation Commission, that could have a significant impact in lowering tensions in the affected area, its inconsistent policies and periodic appeals to nationalism undermine these efforts. End summary

2. (S) The problem of extremism in Thailand differs from that in many of the other countries of the region. Between 5- 10 percent of the population of the country is Muslim, with most of the rest Buddhist. The three southernmost provinces of Thailand, which have a majority ethnic Malay/Muslim population, are now the site of a serious insurgency. This problem is primarily ethnic and to some extent separatist in its origin, rather than sectarian, although there appears to be an increasing effort by separatists to try to stoke religious tensions. It is fueled largely by historical, local grievances over perceptions of unfair treatment by the Thai government, corruption, and poverty. The often heavy-handed, response by the Thai security forces to unrest has exacerbated the problem. Historically, periodic unrest in the South was linked to concerns typical of minority groups: unequal access to state-funded benefits, the desire to maintain language/ethnic identity, and, to some extent, a desire to redraw colonial-era national boundaries -- in this case, to become part of Malaysia or an independent sultanate. The current unrest has its roots, to varying degrees, in these continuing problems, but is also influenced by the newer phenomenon of international, radical Islam. Some Thai Muslims returning from study in the Middle East and South Asia are propagating fundamentalist beliefs and advocating violence; the internet and other media are connecting Thai Muslims to organizations advocating extremism. While there is no evidence of direct involvement by major international terrorist groups in the insurgency, organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah have contacts with southern Malay Muslims and have attempted to spread their ideology. The Thai government has not yet formulated policies that adequately counter this new threat.

3. (SBU) The USG supports a number of programs to counter the rise of extremism. The widest range of programs are funded and managed by the Public Affairs Section, as detailed below:

American Corners: opened ACs in Pattani, Yala and Nakorn Sri Thammarat; post regularly conducts DVCs with the three ACs in the south; long term; in existence since 2004; audiences primarily university students and faculty; effective as a programming venue and for giving students additional opportunities to learn more about the U.S.; audience size: potentially thousands

Shared Futures: post is distributing 3,000 education kits/book bags to students, and 1,200 sewing machines to adult women, who will receive training by a local NGO in Nov. 2005; distribution ceremony for education kits included a presentation on multi-culturalism in the U.S., including Islam in the U.S. short term program July-Nov. 2005; audiences primarily students for book bags and adult women for sewing machines; effectiveness not yet assessed; audience size 4,200

IV Program: 5 out of 28 participants in FY05 Muslim; 11 out of 28 nominated participants in FY06 are Muslim; special IV alumni conference in Pattani to discuss "Peaceful Change" held in Sept. 2004; single country program (SCP) developed for April 2006 on "Multiculturalism in the U.S." with 6

participants; long term; audience primarily adults who are up and coming leaders in Thai society, and increasingly focused on minorities in Thailand; very effective program at countering misunderstanding about U.S. society and people; audience size: 28 grants per year multiplier effect.

Fulbright: EAP/PD gave post \$200,000 to pass to the Commission for southern outreach; short term project - 2003-2005; audience primarily Muslim, or those living in Muslim areas with a commitment to return there; Fulbright very effective at creating long-term mutual understanding; audience size: 4 grants multiplier effect

U.S. Speakers: post regularly sends U.S. speakers to the south to lecture and hold discussions with academic and community audiences; programs have included Dr. Dennis Sandole on "Conflict Resolution"; Mr. Elmer Ransom on "Peaceful Change"; Imam Rahmat Phyakul on "Muslim Life in America"; Ms. Tayyibah Taylor introduced concepts of pluralism and multiculturalism to students and community activists; educated young Thai Muslim audiences about life as an American Muslim woman and importance of religious freedom; shared peaceful strategies for dealing with religious and cultural diversity and how to strengthen civic tolerance; short term programs with long-term impact; ongoing; audiences include a wide spectrum of Thai society; effective at supporting core MPP goals and objectives; audience size: several thousand persons; tens-hundreds of thousands if covered by media.

Embassy Speaker Program: post officers travel around Thailand talking about some aspect of American life; CAO has traveled extensively to regional universities, including the Muslim south, to talk about "Study in the U.S., and American Society and Values; short term programs; ongoing; audiences include a wide spectrum of Thai society, but especially youth; effective at promoting mutual understanding; audience size: hundreds/thousands.

Ambassador,s Fund for Cultural Preservation: FY03 grant to document and preserve southern textile patterns; FY04 grants to document and preserve international influences on Islamic religious architecture in southern Thailand; short term program; audiences include communities where preservation takes place and those interested in Thai heritage; effective at promoting mutual understanding; audience size: thousands.

Democracy Commission/Small Grants Program: small grants have been given to local NGOs working in Muslim areas; projects include translating the Thai constitution into Yawi, promoting community radio, and helping teachers develop civic education curricula; short term; audiences include a wide spectrum of Thai society; effective at supporting indigenous groups to combat extremism; audience size: hundreds/thousands.

Book Donations: collections of books with U.S. themes have been donated to educational institutions in the south; long term; audiences are primarily students; effective at providing audiences with alternate information about the U.S. and the outside world; audience size: thousands.

Publications: post translated the U.S. Bill of Rights into Yawi and Thai and distributed to schools throughout the south; post has distributed more than 8,000 copies of Thai and Yawi versions of "Muslim Life in America" to mosques and schools; post has translated and just distributed 5,000 copies of "The Rights of the People" in Yawi and Thai; long term; audiences are primarily students, mosques and community leaders in Muslim communities in Thailand; effective at providing audiences with alternate information about the U.S. and the outside world; audience size; thousands.

English Language Programs: 150 English language scholarships have been given to Muslim high school students in the south; English Language Fellows are assigned to Hat Yai and Nakorn Sri Thammarat and conduct workshops in the south to improve English teaching; grants have been given to high school students to attend English camps; grants have been given to teachers to attend seminars on English teaching; short term; audiences are high school boys and girls in Muslim areas; effective at giving disadvantaged youth a chance to begin English language study, which will lead to other exchanges and opportunities to communicate with Americans; audience size: hundreds

Media: as part of a TV coop program, ITV carried a 12 part series on "The Muslim Electoral Vote in America"; short term; 2004; audience is all sectors of Thai society, especially Muslim areas; post is translating Shared Stories coop footage from other countries about Muslim Life in American into Yawi and providing tapes to Channel 11 Yala, the only station broadcasting in the south in the local dialect, reaching about 67% of all viewers; effective at introducing audiences to Muslim life in America and enhancing understanding of the U.S. ) reaching the very audiences we want to reach -- young, Yawi-speaking Muslims in the increasingly radicalized

south of Thailand; audience size: potentially hundreds of thousands/millions

Cultural Presentations: August 2005 Jesse Dayton Band performed at PSU Pattani music festival and Nakorn Si Thammarat music festival to introduce audiences to American cultural forms; Toni Blackman hip-hop group will come in Feb. 2006 and will perform at PSU Hat Yai; short term; audiences are thousands of young Thai in urban and provincial areas; effective at introducing Thai youth to various American cultural art forms and giving them an opportunity to interact with real Americans; audience size; thousands in person and potentially millions when covered by media.

14. (SBU) USAID is also involved in administering several programs (using ESF funds) to combat extremism.

Media training. The \$500,000 project will expand and improve objective media coverage of social and political developments throughout Thailand, with particular attention to broader, accurate coverage of minority concerns, regional developments, and social conflict. This program is just beginning; long term; audience size: hundreds directly involved, with multiplier effect.

Civic Education. This \$500,000 program will be implemented through the Asia Foundation and will provide support to help build citizen engagement in and commitment to moderate, democratic values and institutions. The project will focus on efforts in three key areas -- local government, universities and Islamic schools. This project is just beginning; long term; audience size: thousands.

#### Training for Security Forces

15. (C) The inability of the Thai security forces to counter the insurgency without recourse to the excessive use of force and human rights violations is one of the most intractable problems in the South. Mistakes and abuses by the security forces have led to probably hundreds of deaths and have fueled the cycle of violence in the area. The police lack the necessary skills to adequately investigate the scene of insurgent attacks and correctly identify perpetrators. The USG has several programs to address these shortcomings.

Human Rights training for military. Since late 2004, post has been cooperating with the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) so that military training programs (JCET, IMET, and Counternarcotics) include more comprehensive human rights training for military forces before they deploy to the South. This program is too new to assess yet, but we believe that, in general, additional human rights training for the security forces is a good investment. Long term; audience size: thousands

Forensics. ILEA (International Law Enforcement Academy) provides training in post-blast investigation. NAS is preparing to increase support for forensics training for police and expects to have a larger training program in place by the end of 2005. Short term; audience size: dozens.

#### Thai Government Efforts

16. (C) The Thai government has undertaken efforts to combat extremism in the South. The most prominent was the establishment of the National Reconciliation Commission, which includes over forty prominent Thais (including ethnic Malay Muslims), led by a well-respected former Prime Minister. Members of the group are preparing a report making recommendations for government policies to address unrest in the South; many have also written newspaper articles otherwise participated in the public debate over the best responses to the current unrest. The government has increased development funding to the affected regions. It has, in recent years, worked with the Ministry of Education and the local religious schools to ensure that students are taught the national curriculum, receiving comparable education to students in other parts of the country. Many religious schools receive financial support from the RTG.

17. (S) However, RTG statements and policies are inconsistent. The government alternates between statements emphasizing reconciliation and those emphasizing the need to punish communities that support insurgents, or urging the military to take a harder line. In 2005, the security forces have not repeated the mistakes that led to a large number of ethnic Malay Muslim casualties at the Krue Se Mosque and following the demonstrations at Tak Bai in 2004, but some of the unsolved killings in the region are committed by security forces, according to credible evidence. Tensions between Thai Buddhists and ethnic Malay Muslims are high in the affected areas, and there is strong anti-Muslim feeling throughout Thailand as a result of bloody insurgent attacks, including the murder of monks and other innocent civilians.

The appeal to nationalism by some in the government, including the Prime Minister, exacerbates this problem.

#### NGO activities

18. (C) Thailand has an active community of non-governmental organizations, both indigenous and international. Many are seeking ways to contribute to building understanding and to improving the RTG's overall respect for human rights, which will be a key element in addressing many of the grievances of the minority in the South. No NGO is spearheading a large, effective response to extremism; there is a patchwork of local efforts, the impact of which post is not in a position to assess. The embassy is aware of the following groups and individuals from the ethnic Malay Muslim community that we believe can have positive influence in that community.

##### Groups:

- 1) academics in universities with large Muslim populations
- 2) Santichon Islamic School
- 3) Thai Muslim Women's Foundation of Thailand
- 4) Thai Muslimah Volunteer Group
- 5) Tha-It Suksa Islamic School
- 6) Ramkhamhaeng University Muslim Student Club
- 7) Thammasat University Muslim Student Club
- 8) Dhurakijpundit University Muslim Student Club
- 9) Saas-sanu-patham Islamic School, Pattani
- 10) Attakeya Islamic School, Narathiwat
- 11) Friends of Thai Muslim Women, Pattani
- 12) Provincial Islamic councils
- 13) Prince of Songkhla University (PSU)

##### Individuals:

- 1) Mr. Prasert Massaree, Director, Santichon Islamic School
- 2) Ms. Wallapha Neelaphaijit, Chair, Islamic Centre of Thailand
- 3) Ms. Khunying Saengdao Siamwalla, President, Thai Muslim Women Foundation of Thailand
- 4) Dr. Chaiwat Sata-anan, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat Univ
- 5) Prof. Arin Sa-idi, head, American Studies Program, PSU Pattani
- 6) Prof. Bordin Waelateh, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, PSU Pattani
- 7) Dr. Ismail Alee; Director, College of Islamic Studies, PSU Pattani
- 8) Dr. Surin Pitsuwan; Member of Parliament and former Foreign Minister
- 9) Prof. Suchet Mahrem, Vice President, Yala Rajabhat Univ
- 10) Mr. Worawit Baru, Vice President, PSU Pattani
- 11) Mr. Matsukee Daka, teacher, Saiburee Wittaya Islamic School, Pattani
- 12) Mr. Phaisan Toryib, school manager, Attarkiah Islamiah School, Narathiwat
- 13) Ms. Fatima Waesama-air, principal, Jariya Islam Suksa-anusorn School, Pattani
- 14) Mr. Praman Mooktaree, Central Islamic Committee of Thailand and Secretary of the Chiang Mai Islamic Committee.
- 15) Ahmad Somboon Bualuang, former PSU Professor and current National Reconciliation Committee member.

BOYCE